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CERTAINTIES IN RELIGION:

BY THE

REV. J. A. WILLIAMS, D.D., F.T.L.

THE SOUL'S ANCHOR:

BY THE

REV. GEORGE McRITCHIE.

BEING THE FIFTH

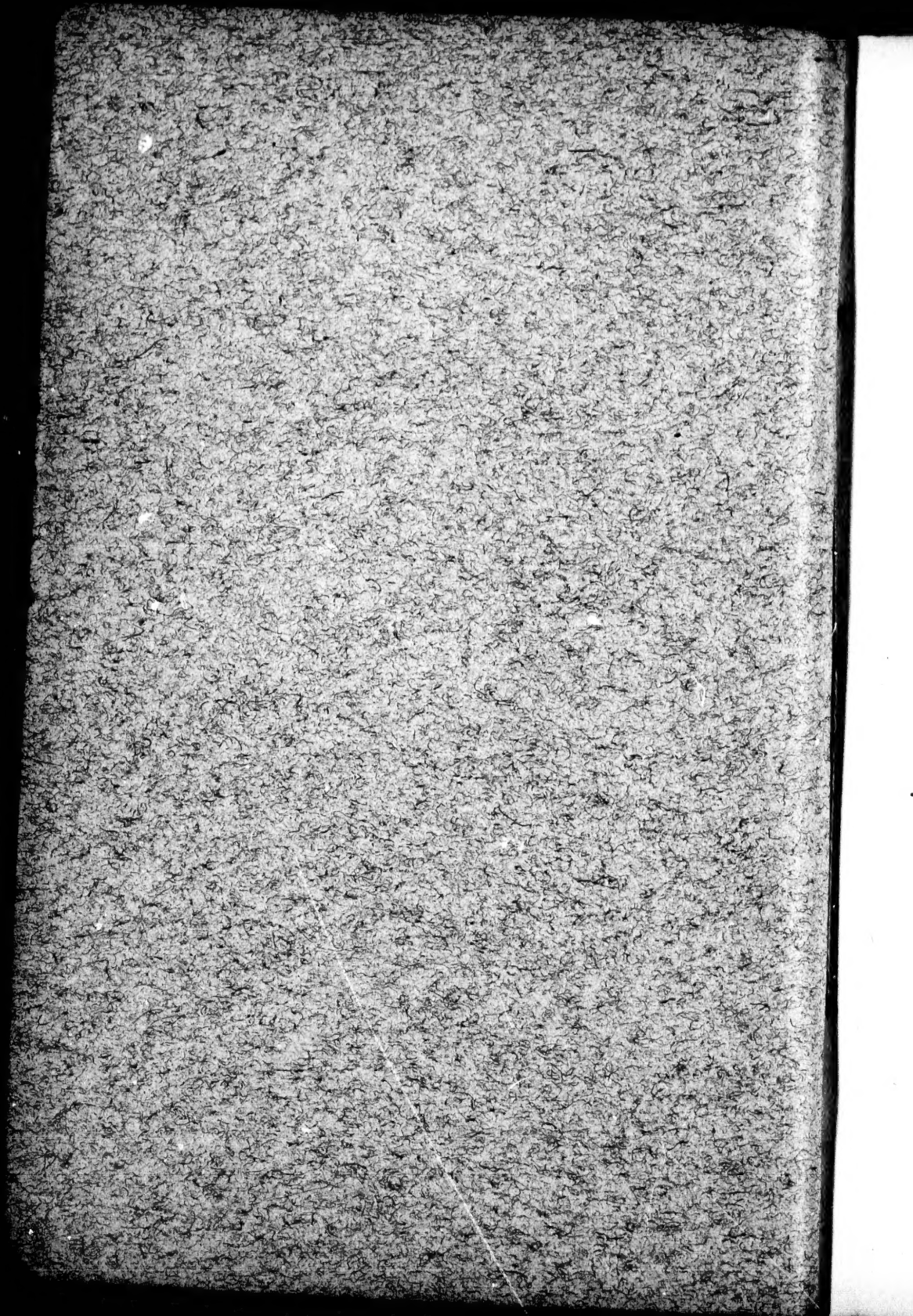
ANNUAL LECTURE AND SERMON

BEFORE THE

THEOLOGICAL UNION OF VICTORIA COLLEGE, IN 1882.

TORONTO:
WILLIAM BRIGGS,
78 & 80 KING STREET EAST.

1892.



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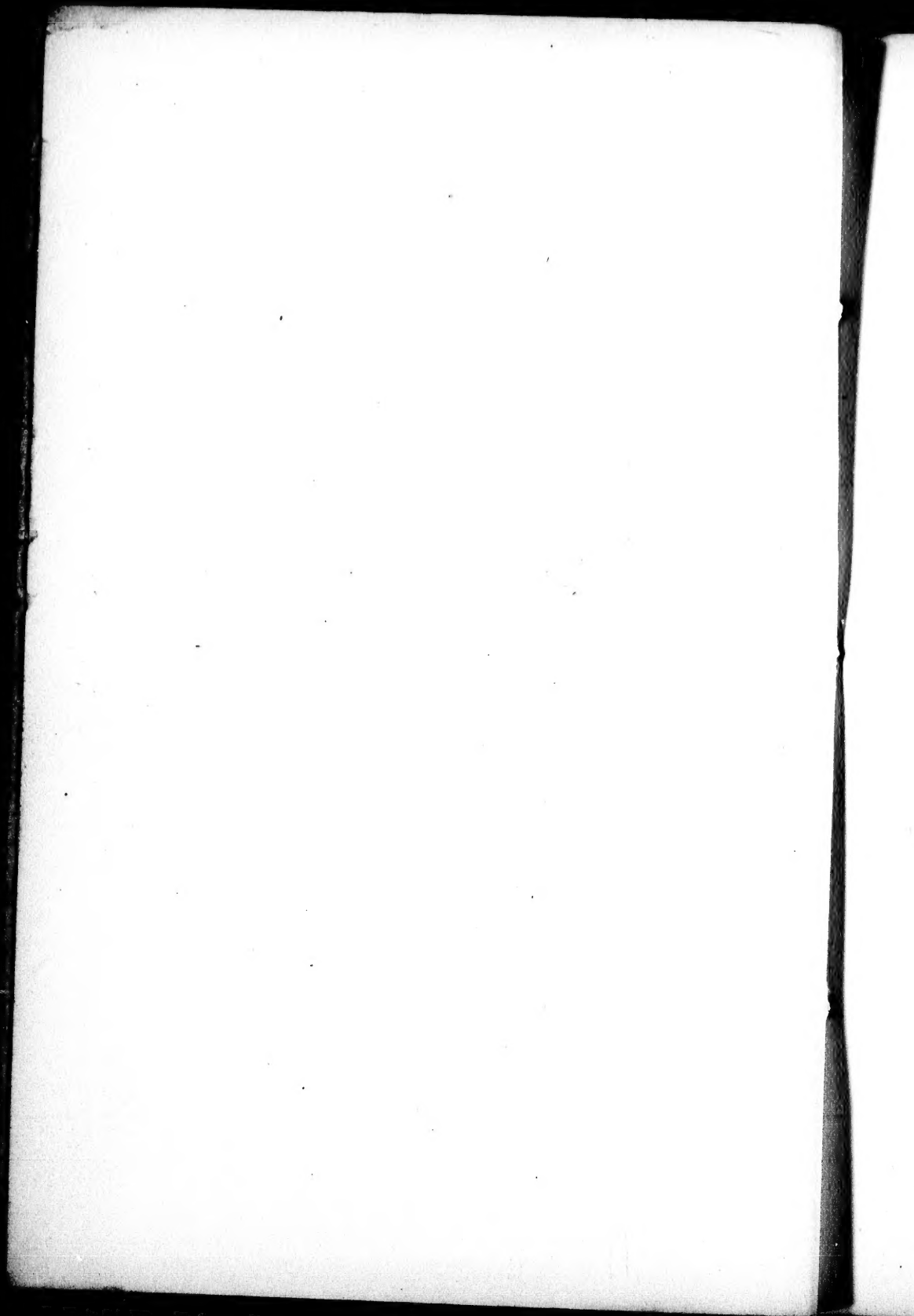
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Certainties in Religion:

**A LECTURE DELIVERED BEFORE THE THEOLOGICAL UNION OF
VICTORIA UNIVERSITY, MAY 15TH, 1882.**

BY THE

REV. J. A. WILLIAMS, D.D., F.T.L.

NOTE.—In preparing this Lecture I have consulted Morell's "Philosophy of Religion," White's "Certainty in Religion," Dooner's "System of Christian Doctrine," and "Life and Letters of Scheiermacher."

LECTURE.

Certainties in Religion.

THE age in which we live may truly be called a questioning age; an age of mental unrest and disquiet. At no period in the past was mental life more active, more earnest, more critical in its habit, or more analytic in its character, than we find it at the present time. It is, indeed, more critical than creative, more speculative than practical.

When we remember the tendencies of modern thought, the unsettling character of many of its conclusions, especially in the region of theology, and the claims and demands of those who are accepted as leaders, it is not at all surprising that many persons should regard it with distrust and alarm; while others regard it as the outcome of the agonies of thought through which the human mind has travailed. Men there are, whose fidelity to truth is not to be questioned, who rejoice in the clearing out of the accretions that

have deformed the faith, and hidden the beauties of that Christianity which was, we believe, revealed by the Creator of the human mind. Certainly it is no bad sign, in these days of preponderating material interests, to find that the thought of the age is so much taken up with questions on religion, and subjects related thereto, out of which, doubtless, there will come a wider truth, a larger and fuller living knowledge of the truth, beauty, and goodness to which the human soul is heir, as evidenced in the revelation of Jesus Christ.

It has been stated, and some have undertaken to prove, that the Christian religion cannot stand the test of scientific investigation, and that the progress of discovery, the growth of intelligence, and the consequent liberating of the human mind from the bondage of untenable dogma, must terminate in the rejection of Christianity; and there are those who stand on tip-toe, looking, watching, waiting, with ardent anxious expectation for some development of science, or some new phase of philosophy, which may turn to the disadvantage of revealed religion; and it is with difficulty they conceal their disappointment at the growth of Christian thought as a spiritual movement,—a living power, intelligible and rational; embraced, not as a burden, but as a privilege; giving freedom and elevation to mind and thought; nourishing patient and resolute hope; and creating sentiment more potent than any other force or agent in human affairs. It is lamentable that so few of those who set themselves to

oppose revealed religion have been at the trouble to examine it in its contents. Looking at it, through the traditions that have gathered round it, they conceive of it as infertile, as having spoken its last word—as dead. But we say it is for the soul whose great distinction is to grow in knowledge, truth, purity, for ever; and that as a divine revelation it is inexhaustible, and infinitely fruitful.

In our contention with unbelief, we affirm, that in those who receive the truth, there is a conviction of its divine origin; a consciousness of its adaptation to their noblest faculties, and of its exalting and ennobling influences; of its power to harmonize reason and passion, conviction and choice; to create a peace, to confer and sustain a happiness as gratifying as it is assuring. We aver that there are thousands of intelligent Christians who believe the divine record of Jesus; it has so inwrought itself into their moral nature, and entwined itself around the fibres of their affections, and has created such expectations and hopes, that they can, with relying confidence, cast their whole being upon Him, assured that He who has been true to them in time, will not be untrue to them in eternity. And this is evidential to thousands who have neither leisure nor ability to study the elaborate tomes which, at the present day, are furnished on "Christian Evidences," yet hold on to their faith with a tenacity of grip which no bare argument could ever produce, and which finds its strength in a conscious *I know*. And this is the point of our present discussion.

What are the requisites of certainty, and how far can the principles of scientific certainty be applied to religion? To those who are troubled with no doubt, unquestioning faith is the harbour in which they repose; but the moment they begin to interrogate their faith they are surprised with the question, "How do I know this? and how is knowledge to be verified to us?" It is not necessary for me to discuss the fundamental positions of the theory of knowledge; sufficient for my present purpose to define it. Knowledge seems to me to "consist of true and certain judgments, and the sum of our actual knowledge is the sum of the judgments made by us; and the capacity for multiplying such judgments is the limit of our possible knowledge." All knowledge is concerned with certainty; and the steadfastness of Christian faith and virtue depends upon the evidence with which Christian truth is certified to us. It would be a serious objection to religion if it should be withdrawn from those universal rules and laws by which we arrive at certainty in any other department of science; nor is it possible to discard them if we would form a correct judgment as to what Christianity is, and which of the various possible relations to it corresponds most accurately with Christianity itself.

Christianity presents itself, with its phenomena, to the mind for acceptance. It challenges observation. It presents its facts, and asks that they be tested by the ordinary laws of evidence. It commends itself to human thought as a matter that may be brought within

the range of our knowledge. It is remarkable with what repetition the doctrine of certainty is presented in the Scriptures. It is difficult to conceive of a word expressive of absolute truth and trust-worthiness, and intense faith, founded on the truth, which the writers of the New Testament have not employed. In the Gospels Christ is set forth as The Truth, The Truth of Eternal Thought. There is a certain something in His "Verily, verily, I say unto you," which carries a sense of authority to conscience and to the heart, such as to command attention and homage. His words are the true sayings of God, on which the world might lean and rest. On opening the Epistles we have the results growing out of belief of the truth. We frequently meet expressions, which, if they mean anything to us, are expressive of certainty—take as examples the expressions used by St. Paul—*epignosis*, full or thorough knowledge; *parrhesia*, boldness, confidence, assurance; *plesophosia*, full assurance of the understanding; *asphaleia*, surety, certainty, or St. John's, "*these things* have I written unto you, that ye may *know* that ye have eternal life." And we *know* that the Son of God is come and hath given us an understanding, or more correctly, an *intelligence*, that we might know Him that *is true*, or that we might know the *True One*, and we are in the *True One*, even in *Jesus Christ*. The generations of men stand in close relations intellectually and spiritually; there is a vital union, a solidarity in humanity. The volumes of nature and revelation are open to us as to our

fathers and the generations before them, the truth that was believed, and accepted, as coming within their spiritual insight, IS FOREVER.

I do not now, and here, enter upon the large question of the genesis of the religions of the world, nor their historical and philosophical significance; nor do I enter upon the question of the authority of the Christian Scriptures, or of the supernatural origin of Christianity; but accept, without question, the statements of the book itself, which, as we have seen, give no uncertain sound as to the truth of its contents, and upon which its whole scheme of doctrine and teaching is based; nor need I stop to enquire how faith in the Divine revelations and facts took root, and became so fixed in the minds of men as to be the grand and most stimulating factor in human progress, implying, as that does, all that is substantially precious in liberty, science, and social culture, the highest civilization of which we can boast. All this may be admitted, but as Christianity presents to us many phases, and is seen in incomplete stages, and surrounded by many false forms, it is necessary to note—that if we attach the main importance to the historical side of Christianity, we shall arrive at no other certainty than that which is identified with the historical sources which testify of its contents, and, further, find ourselves encumbered with tracing the pedigree of manuscripts, questioning the surmises of tradition, and embarrassed with the multitude of claims to authority. So, on the other hand, dissatisfied with a

bare historic faith, we may embrace a mere ideal as the peculiar essence of Christianity, and by that means hope to attain a more intense and inward certainty, and find nothing but incompleteness. If we conceive of it simply as regulative, as necessary to social order, as an indispensable ornament of character, our ideal will be faulty; we shall neither perceive the beauty nor the reality of the truth; we do but paint our own ideal portrait—a mere canvas thing—without living substantial goodness. If our ideal reaches no farther than the relative fitness to us, or if we accept the revelation because the hypothesis seems to open the best training-school for our human nature, we shall find ourselves in a famished condition if we try to satisfy our hunger for certainty with these husks. There is a restlessness and ingenuity, which, think of it as we may, are continually dissipating the first impressions we feel, whether of reason or of conscience, and we are embarrassed by the elaborate justifications we create. Religion becomes a mere tool of expediency; the ideal, chosen it may be from prudence, is removable at pleasure, and neither according with our perceptions, nor the deep intuitions of the soul, the foundation of our hopes is artificial and unreal. "Religion," it has been well observed, "is a system of truth as well as duty; its right to be obeyed rests on its right to be believed. If religion is not truth, it cannot be conduct; if it does not on the intellectual side represent the order and reason of the universe, it need not on the moral,

attempt to rule and regulate the life of the individual. A religion possesses moral power only as it satisfies the reason. When the intellect is unconvinced the conscience cannot be persuaded or coerced; hence it is that the moral quality and worth of a religion depends upon the moral character of its highest conception. As men conceive God—or the supreme object of belief—they conceive duty. The Moral Law of Moses implied the God of Moses, only expressed a circle of duties springing necessarily from his nature and relation to man and men." Our Christian virtues, and what is attainable in the Christian life, flow from our idea of Christ.

The Christian religion, while it is regarded by some as only one among others, is vastly different from any that preceded it, or from any that have risen subsequent to it. Christianity is the fulfilment of all that was prefigured, waited for, desired in the ancient world. Jesus Christ is more than the sublimest of teachers, or the greatest of prophets, for He did not only bear witness to the truth, but was empowered to say, with the calmness of assurance that carried with it a weight of moral authority, *I am the truth*; so that unlike all other religions, the person of the founder is divested of the casual, and is set forth as an essential constituent of the religion itself, and is raised to a doctrinal importance in it. Viewing Christianity as the religion of redemption, and the religion of life, and inquiring in what its individuality lies, and what are its methods in developing, building up, and maturing that intense

piety which is most compatible, with its aims, we shall at once perceive that redemption is grounded in the person of Christ, by virtue of the unprecedented union of divine and human life in His personal nature, and in His actions; and that this redemption through Christ is a fact, and is known to be complete and adequate, because He, Himself, possesses the power by which liberation from penalty, from sin, for the perfecting of personal character, and for producing and maintaining the highest style of moral life in communities. If we, for a moment, look at the records in which Christian faith expressed itself at its origin, we shall find that, by common consent, Jesus Christ is designated the corner stone of the new building of the kingdom of God. Christ is the *themelios*, the foundation of the whole Christian religion. Then what are its claims? It claims to be *power*; it claims to be *life*; to confer *power* by creating *life*. This not only distinguishes the Christian from all other religions, it places it on an altogether different footing, and sets it at an unapproachable distance above all; a distance in which all analogy is lost. Other religions might stimulate, guide, or teach, they have nothing to give. Other religions might be developments of the natural, mental, or the moral man, they could do no more; but Christianity claims that it has the *power* to communicate life, not ordinary vitality, not intellectual, not morality, but something beyond, a new endowment, differing essentially from every thing else which science knows; and it is embodied in one word CHRIST: the whole chan-

nel of life in God, the power of a perfect religion—atonement, redemption, fellowship. It claims to be *religious truth*, and communicates true knowledge, to be the light and life of the world—grace, truth, power, and wisdom. Religious truth appeared in the world in realized form, and as the true realization in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, called by the Church the God-man, because of the personal unity of the divine and the human, the ideal and the real; so that the principle of Christianity is in Him; in Him it has its source; and such are the representations of the early records that without Him Christianity would be incomprehensible.

The question to be met here is, what is the guarantee of Christian truth as real? Where are its criteria of certainty? There are no more important questions in the range of theological enquiry than these; none more practical or more closely related to the quiet and repose of the affections. All substantial knowledge admits of verification. There is in connection with the growth and progress of Christianity the testimony of millions who believe they have verified the truth taught by Jesus Christ and His apostles in relation to the great principle of redemption, and have brought within the range of their personal experience not only the fact that God loves them, but that if they speak to Him, He answers them; and further, that as a body of testimony, if we look at it in its immense multiformity, extent, and persistence, we find nothing in human history to compare with it. It has the breadth and

steadfastness of a law of nature. And is it to us without its meaning? When I read, or hear men talk their commonplaces about the immutability of physical law, I am inclined to ask what of this broad and hard beaten track of human experience? What does it mean? We are not at liberty to pass it by. It is there with its facts, and its outcome, and it challenges inspection and scrutiny by the mind to which it proffers its ministry. All knowledge must be mediate or immediate, and must arise either from some previous idea to which it is referred, and from which it is evolved, or first from the perception of axiomatic truths, or thoughts which are self-evident; and then by means of reflection and discursive thinking, may be further developed into indirect certainty, in which the logical and intuitional faculties are joined in the same result, and a scientific validity given to our conceptions, so as to serve the purpose of scientific truth.

On a question of such importance, it is not surprising that many theories should have been propounded for the relief and satisfaction of those who desire certainty in the matter of religious faith. Vast, and ancient organizations, claiming to be the Church, and to speak and teach with authority, dominate a large portion of Europe—offshoots of which are to be found in our own country. This theory of authority has many phases. The Church, in its organized character, has many important interests to serve, both in relation to worship and education; yet, inasmuch as within the Church there is diversity of opinion respecting what is, and

what is not, to be received, and as each organized body, or separate religious community, presents for our acceptance different results, for which it pleads authority, we are set upon the quest as to which of the many is right; and we enter upon a logical process before the contents of the Christian faith are received. Contact with the religious object is not possible; and if we do not reach out for some authority above the bare traditional, the only certainty we can attain is that derived from confidence in the testimony of the Church, as expressed in traditions, creeds, articles, and standards. But the certainty which rests upon the eternal, living, and self-evidencing truth is not apprehended because hidden in a wordy statement of doctrine and precept, which the Church deems necessary to be believed. Whoever rests here is liable "to be tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, in craftiness, after the wiles of error," and will fail to attain even a moral and satisfactory conception of the Christianity of Christ, or any certainty of practical value of the great und ultimate truth which Christ reveals. Is there then, it may be asked, no value to be attached to the fact that organized Christianity presents us with, namely, that large masses of men are found, who, though placed in different circumstances, and educated under varying influences, are unanimous in their adherence to certain truths, and this unanimity has continued through a series of centuries? Yes; it has value,—and is a factor in historical evidence, and

gives us the prestige of veracity. But even here—whoever rests in it—will find himself unable to separate from the great mass of doctrine and statement—the true and trustworthy—without the exercise of his individual reason, or an appeal to some principle of certainty, and to do either he must relinquish the theory of Church authority.

It has been put forth as a theory of certainty that inasmuch as Christianity addresses the understanding of man, both as it regards the facts of revelation, and the evidence on which they rest, it is to be judged by the laws of the human understanding; and as reason holds supremacy over the other faculties, its voice and its decision alone can settle the grave question of certainty. In other words it means, that our rational nature is capable of judging of the possibility, necessity, and reality of revelation; or that every doctrine of revelation, and every element of religious life, as exhibited in the Scriptures, is within the limits of nature and knowledge, and in the exercise of our natural faculties we may find the truth certified to us. But whoever rests here will find he is on a quicksand. I will take that single article of belief in the goodness and perfection of God, which is said to be a first point in natural religion, and I would ask any one, in accordance with the scientific spirit of this age, to subject this single article of natural religion, which is the product of reason, to the analysis of reason; to bring it into contact with a rigid scientific standard, and discuss its contents face to face with the tre-

mendous problem of moral evil, and then tell us its results. If so feeble in its own domain, what can it do for us in the domain of the spiritual? The speculations of the most acute intellect cannot be ranked as science. Speculation does not embody certainty. We must rise above Nature, we must pass beyond the realm of sight, and sense, and observation, before we enter into that state in which "meridian evidence puts doubt to flight," and we gain the certainty of things not seen—

" Things unknown to feeble sense,
Unseen by reason's glimmering ray."

There is a hesitancy, an uncertainty, a perplexity about our natural knowledge; such difficulty in deciding what are, and what are not, the criteria to which revelation must conform; and then, solving the question, does the revelation of Scripture conform to these criteria, so that instead of finding a resting-place, we are moving in a circle, walking through dry places, seeking rest and finding none. All this is said without any disparagement to the rational nature, or to those great intellectual endowments which God has conferred, and which are of such great moment in building up the spiritual fabric we call the religious; but certainty must be looked for elsewhere, and in another use of these great mental and moral endowments. Is reason, then, of no use in religion? Yes; "much every way." We know what it has attained when it has exhibited its highest power, and when

animated by sound moral instincts, even without the aid of revelation. We know of the lofty anticipations, and the dim apprehension of mighty realities it brought within the vision and hopes of man; and it has a part to play, and a field of operation in personal Christianity, but it is not the foundation.

Let me now present, as I may, the *positive* side. In looking into the contents of the revelation in Jesus Christ, we find *history, truth, life*. The facts of the history, the contents of the truth, and the methods by which the life is developed, are presented to our faith for acceptance, which may result in an experience solid and secure against all assailants. We believe the highest dignity conferred upon the human race, grows out of the fact, that it is made in the image and likeness of God—made for communion with God—a communion personal, positive, and unintermittent. The end of Christ's manifestation—the final cause—was to remove the barriers to this communion by bringing the human into harmony with the divine, without doing violence to any law, mental or moral, which formed the original endowment, and for the rest and repose of the soul, and its progressive advancement in truth, purity, and love. This restoration, and the mental and moral process through which the soul passes, have the same sure basis of certainty as ethics, or any physical science has. It rests in an immediate knowledge, in a fact of life. If it is said that by such a process of argument you ground the certainty of religion in Christianity itself, we say, yes; for where

else should we be likely to find evidence of its divineness? If modern science goes back to its first principles, surely we may go to the first principles of that science which will outlast the material. If science never grows weary of iterating its first truths, surely we may speak of the elements, the facts of the spiritual life.

Fortunately the examples of the process of religious thought, till we attain the position of personal communion, are not far to seek. The divine revelation addresses a universal principle, a principle in constant operation, which lies at the root of all knowledge, and which, equally with reason, belongs to human nature—faith. Its great statements are received as from God, the religious feeling is awakened, the ethical truth in the word, through the Divine Spirit, who is inseparably connected with the revelation of recovery, arouses the ethical faculty of the mind—conscience. There is enquiring after God, from whom the soul has been estranged; there is a movement in the conscience, want of rectitude is felt; there is sense of wrong within. Is this a fact? is it not patent as life? Now, at this point, what is the evidence? Could anything be more demonstrative than this waking up of thought or impulse, attested as it is by the consciousness, the understanding, and the judgment; conscience bearing testimony to the operation of a great ethical principle, which has led to necessary but bitter self-knowledge, even this, that we are not what we should be, nor what we would be. And this is a true and

certain judgment; not a fancy, nor the result of a morbid feeling; here is a fact. It is but an initial step, but it is marked with certainty. From this condition, in which, if true to ourselves, we are held by the strong ethical principle, which now dominates the soul, we enter, as it were, into a new sphere, in which God, righteousness, guilt, become true in a sense they never were before. We are presented to ourselves in a character and relation of which we had no conception before. The reality of guilt, the sense of personal sin, the feeling of estrangement from truth and righteousness of life; here are facts, states of mind. Here is the authority of the conscience approved by the understanding, resulting in most certain knowledge, even if it be of a painful character. The consciousness of guilt has aroused a high moral purpose, which, while it exposes to the mind its moral weakness, sharpens and deepens the longing for deliverance, and creates an ardent desire for reconciliation. Even this state of mind, of mental and moral unrest, is more in accord with the spirit and purpose of Christianity than a mere resting in historic faith. This estrangement, as a fact, is attested as any other fact is attested. Here revelation comes to our help with its manifestation of God in Christ, which, while it addresses itself to the receptive properties of the soul as worthy of its confidence, it satisfies the reason with its evidence that it is the complement of the divine plans for human happiness. Its provisions are as real as the soul needs. It has forgiveness of sin,

spiritual cleansing, divine communion, life. Yet the transition from a state of guilt to salvation and rectitude of life is never without the soul's election and consent. Faith is the personal act that brings us into new relations with truth, Christ, and God. If it is asked what is this faith, and what is involved in this action of the soul? enough here to say, Faith is an act of the soul, and so related to the three great constituents of our nature, the intellect, the sensibility, and the will, as to be at once receptive, assimilative, and operative. It is the uniting principle. Its logical basis is God as revealed in Christ, and the contents of that revelation. The action and results of faith must be evidential. Here is the process: Truth is apprehended—redemptive truth, mind convinced, and, aided by the spirit, is led through various processes of thought and action, each with the concurrence of the will, till Christ is apprehended as promised, in which action the whole internal nature of man has been involved. The result—a new consciousness, a divine adoption, a new being, a new creature. Religious certainty is attained, the knowledge of salvation, is a true and certain judgment of the adjusted and harmonious relation in which we stand to God. And this knowledge is not deduced from logical premises, is not inferential, but immediate. Christ is revealed in the consciousness; and this ground of certainty is scientific; for the ultimate and fundamental truths of science have no other ground of certainty. This is the last test; for what of facts, and phenomena, and the

generalization of partial inductions, and the application of laws and principles, unless the results reached are intuitively recognized as of *a priori* necessity. But further, if there is in the divine revelation an antidote and remedy for the moral evil of the world, and its restriction to order and moral harmony, through the infinite love of God, as exhibited in Jesus Christ, and this system is so coherent and complete that it satisfies the scientific consciousness, that is we cannot conceive of its not being true, then is there a certainty of conviction, which prepares the way for intuition. Much more so, when these great truths become matters of consciousness, when the whole internal process is present to the mind. The cause and the effect, indeed, the whole phenomena of the gracious change that has been wrought; there is a positiveness and strength of conviction, a knowledge, such as experience alone can produce, which is at once as assuring as it is comforting.

Further, the testimony is not merely subjective, or we might be deluded and rest upon our own efforts, and seek repose in the moral strength we had attained, or in the new light we had received. Another heart does not always imply a new heart. We are so united to Him who is our head, that we are acknowledged by God in Christ, and loved by Him. His love, His joy, His peace, whatever those words may import, is, as I have said above, a new consciousness; a consciousness of which we were entirely destitute till the moment of our contact with God through faith. More—this i

knowledge; whether we are able to define its contents or not, it is the result of believing in the witness that God hath borne in His Son, and the witness is this: "That God gave unto us eternal life, and this life is in His Son." This is that intelligence which is given that we may know Him that is true. There is that *Summarturia* of which St. Paul speaks to the Romans: "The Spirit Himself beareth witness with our spirit that we are the children of God," and this Spirit is truth. The evidence of personal consciousness, which is, at the same time, corroborated by the moral and mental faculties, and the testimony of the divine Spirit, is such a basis of certainty as satisfies both faith and reason.

God must be self-revealing, if revealed at all—and His revelations must not only be adapted to the beings to whom they are made, but must in some way evidence that they are the sayings of God. Therefore it is not surprising that there should be such strong commanding *evidence of certainty*—a verification of the truth, such as scientific certainty could not possibly attain. For it is not the gathering up of facts, and classifying our observations, or solving a problem. The certainty of religion is, that we ourselves, move, live in its atmosphere, that we, in our personality, have laid hold of it, appropriated it, live in it. The Divine Omnipresent Christ, grasped and held by faith, unfolds His character, and the contents of the salvation achieved for us. We know Him, we know His aims, His work. The intention of God, as expressed of old, is, "I will

—God the Spirit dwelling in the temple. He is perpetually asserting His presence by the spiritual transformation He effects. We seek Him without, we find Him within us; we seek Him in the understanding, we find Him in the heart. He gives His benediction to each and all of our spiritual faculties. His presence itself is that peace of God which passeth all understanding.

The progress in the Christian life has the same evidence of certainty. Christian truth becomes more true because of the manner in which it has been verified; and is both regulative and controlling. There is a growth in knowledge united with faith: "That Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; to the end that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be strong to apprehend with all the saints what is the breadth, and length, and height, and depth, and to know the love of God which passeth knowledge, that ye may be filled with all the fulness of God."

The certainty of religion is not grounded in feeling merely, because the whole personality is active and receptive; the will, and the faculty of knowledge, understanding, judgment, conscience, and thus its immediate certainty is related to the whole person, and has nothing to fear from, nor does it object to discussion, clear and precise thought, for by the correct course of discursive thinking, as well as in the logical method pursued, we shall find the truth more than confirmed. It is not to be expected that thoughtful

minds will be occupied with the objective only; but that the inner experience, that result of conscious contact with God, can and will become matter of reflective elaboration, and the experience that will not stand this test is not only unsatisfactory, but must be defective either in the knowledge on which it is based, or in the method of its development.

I don't think I have stated anything new. I have simply, and according to my light, placed before you the Wesleyan and Scriptural doctrine of Assurance, because of the convictions that I have that neither in creeds, confessions, nor standards—which are largely traditional—can you find the centre of the Christian system, upon which a soul may rest with certainty. Faith rests in Christ as God's revelation of Himself, and it is the commitment of ourselves to Him in all that He offers Himself to us for, and in all that He requires of us. It brings us into personal relation to Christ, who becomes an object of affection, the source of power, because source of life—life definite and resident in the human soul. "He that hath the Son hath life." A new, distinct, and supernatural endowment is the result. "I in them, and they in Me." Union, fellowship, confidence, Divine association, intimacy. The soul made in the image of God, walks with Him in peace and friendship; no longer afraid of His coming, desires His presence, and looks forward to the open vision, when it shall be like Him, and see Him face to face.

In this blessed assurance we recall the hymn sung

frequently by the religious associates of our younger manhood :—

“ And when I’m to die,
Receive me, I’ll cry,
For Jesus hath loved me,—I cannot tell why !
But this I do find,
We two are so joined,
He’ll not live in glory and leave me behind.”

For myself, I rejoice in the earnestness of the age ; in its earnestness of enquiry, and earnestness of effort. It is not the heartless, sarcastic age of Voltaire and Gibbon. The air is thick with vital questions ; we cannot ignore them. It is no time to wrangle about little points in technical theology, when men are earnest in their enquiries concerning the first elements of religion. More and more clear may our testimony become that the revelation of Jesus Christ, and the religion grounded thereon, is just, holy, and true ; and in the knowledge of Christ, and loving Him, all artificial barriers—ecclesiastical and social—will give way. Christians will come to know and love each other, and the prayer of Christ, that His followers may all be one, answered ; and the purposes of God, as disclosed by the Apostle, be visibly in the way of accomplishment : “ That in the dispensation of the fulness of the times He might gather together in one, all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are in earth, even in HIM.”

The Soul's Anchor:

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SERMON.

The Soul's Anchor.

"Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that within the veil."—HEB. 6. 19.

THE soul anchored and ever moving in its progress, are ideas that seem out of harmony. A ship at anchor is one which has stopped for refuge from stress of weather, or finished its voyage and reached the harbor; but the soul never stops in its course, and never finishes its voyage. The want of harmony is only apparent, not real, for there are other kinds of anchorage. Our earth is anchored to the sun, yet moves on in its orbit the more swiftly and securely because of its moorings. The soul may have this anchorage, both sure and steadfast, and move on more speedily and safely in its line of duty and destiny. This hope which is as an anchor, does not fasten it into stillness or stagnation, but allows the fullest freedom of action and progress. It gives the soul a firm conviction and assurance, and keeps it steadily in the way of righteousness and safety.

We need such anchorage. We are launched forth into life, and begin our course over the ocean of thought, vast as space, and wide as infinity. We have minds to think, hearts to feel, wills to decide, yet with all our powers, confess the need of something more to guide us aright on life's voyage. We cannot tell from experience, we have never passed the way before, we cannot decide from appearance, the smooth surface may hide real and imminent dangers. On the ever moving sea of human thought and experience, there are no fixed waymarks to show us the safe course. The necessity is one too deeply felt to be questioned. The text presents it truly as an alarming danger from which men flee, to find refuge by laying hold of the hope set before them.

Where is this needed anchorage to be found? Not in man himself, for the voice of Wisdom says, "Lean not unto thine own understanding." Not among the numerous human creeds, masters, and teachers that offer a settled foundation for our faith. Not from trusting in our fellowmen who are fallible as ourselves. Some tell us we can find it by studying the volume of nature, and knowing and obeying the truth. Suppose we could thus find the truth, and possessed a knowledge of all that regulates and affects our being, we would be but little nearer to what we need. Truth is not a being, it is but a thing. Beautiful and symmetrical it may be in all its proportions and relations, and pleasant to the eyes of the student, yet at best it is but a thing. It, therefore, lacks power

to enforce itself. It may possess some fascination for a class of minds, some affinity for thoughtful men, but it has no governmental, legal, or personal authority to give effect to its own decrees. It can compel assent, for the mind must believe what it knows to be true, but it may be, yes, often is, held in unrighteousness, and thus opposed and disobeyed. It lacks a living personality. The best and safest moorings any man can have for this life, are the ties and influences of a good home. This is not a picture in the imagination of what a home should be, not a well-constructed scheme of domestic life, not any special plan or hobby over which a man might become enthusiastic; its essence is in the living beings who dwell in it, and in the affections that have their spring and centre there. The soul can find no safe refuge, no abiding, staying power in thought, science, or abstract truth; it needs a home centre of life and love. It must have a living personality to meet its longings and give it abiding security and satisfaction.

The text turns our thoughts to the temple of Solomon. Here, between the outer courts of the Lord's house, and the most holy place of Jehovah's presence, was the separating and concealing veil. Around that temple many gathered to worship, whose faith saw not within the veil. They saw the sacred and mysterious building, the smoking sacrifice, the ministering priests, but not the presence of the living God. Thus, between the outer courts of nature, or the acts of ceremonial worship, and the presence of God, is a

mysterious separating veil, through which our natural eye cannot penetrate. Jehovah, though declared by His works, is yet behind the veil, away beyond the thinking and searching of fallen man's unassisted reason. "We cannot by searching find out God." It was a great help to the worshippers, in attaining a sense of God's presence, to see the high priest, on the day of atonement, enter the holy place in their behalf. Our High Priest and forerunner has entered within the holy place for us, let us follow Him in thought, and ask what is within that veil? This question does not lead us to inquire into the object of this hope, but the basis on which it rests.

I. WE HAVE WITHIN THE VEIL A LIVING PERSONAL
GOD.

The most holy place was prepared under God's special direction, and chosen by Him as His habitation: "Here will I dwell, for I have desired it," saith the Lord. In Ex. 29. 42 and 43, God promises to "meet with the children of Israel and speak with them, and to sanctify the tabernacle with His glory." And again, "I will dwell among the children of Israel, and I will be their God." He makes this dwelling among them conditional on their keeping His commandments. God fulfilled His promise, and did in very deed dwell among His people. Here He met and talked with them through Moses, and subsequently through the high priest. While they were obedient, He never forsook or failed them in their

time of need. When they sincerely repented and sought Him, He was found of them. A very present help was their God.

It was no image of some imaginary deity, or representation of a mysterious cause or power, but a real manifestation of the true God that was tabernacled here. It was the God of Abraham who talked with him and blessed him; the God of Bethel who appeared to Jacob in the land of Luz; the God who called Moses from the burning bush, and sent him to lead His people; the God of the cloud and the pillar, who brought Israel out of Egypt with a high hand and an outstretched arm; it was the Lord God of Sinai, whose voice spake the commandments and made the listening multitude exceedingly quake and fear, who dwelt within the veil.

In the fulness of time, when the Mosaic economy had served its purpose, the veil is rent, and the temple passes away. Ere this takes place, the promised Messiah appears, and God is manifest in the flesh. The veil of Christ's humanity is not so thick, nor the sanctuary so dark, as that of the temple. God is more fully revealed, and His glory more clearly seen in the person and life of our Immanuel. The manifestation of the divine attributes attest the Godhead in Christ; power in His miracles, compassion in the sympathy and tenderness with which He ministers to suffering men, wisdom in His words, and perfect holiness in His spotless life. Above all, the infinite love of God, as seen in His passion and death on the cross, reveals

to us a present God. "Here the whole Deity is known." Here the fulness of a Father's love is gathered into the focus of the cross, from which it spreads in rays of light, love, and hope over a benighted and sinful world. Do we ask with Philip, "Show us the Father and it sufficeth us." The answer, in view of the finished work of Christ, comes back to us with demonstrative force: "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father, and how sayest thou then show us the Father."

Christ is with us in bodily presence no more. He has ascended up on high, and a cloud has received Him out of our sight. Unbelief might ask: "Where is now thy God?" We answer, Christ is with His Church to the end of the world, and the special gift of the Holy Ghost has descended upon His disciples, and abides with them still. The presence of the Divine Spirit is felt by believing worshippers, and seen in the effects produced in the Church. It was no cunningly devised fable, propagated by earthly skill or power, that forced its way to acceptance and influence against the determined opposition and fierce persecution of the apostolic days. It is no God-forsaken enterprise that still holds its place in a hostile world, and sheds the light of morning twilight into the midnight shades of idolatry and sin. It is no merely human device that has gone on for centuries reforming society, comforting human hearts, and clothing in holiness the true believers in Christ. Who can believe that the Christian Church of to-day is not

of Divine, but of Satanic origin? We cannot. The world is not without its witness of a present, personal God, for the Holy One of Israel is in the midst of His Church, mighty to save.

The mode of the manifestation of God has changed with the increasing light and spirituality of the Church. From the time that man was driven forth from the presence of the Lord till the coming of Christ, it was chiefly through the symbol of fire, commencing with the placing of the cherubim and the flaming sword at the east of the Garden of Eden. The Shekinah, described by Ezekiel as "a fire unfolding itself, and a brightness about it, and out of the midst thereof as the color of amber," dwelt in the most holy place, and continued there while Israel was obedient, until Messiah appeared. Now the Word which was God was made flesh, and men beheld His glory. In the last days the spirit is poured out, and abides to the end of time. The changes of manifestation have been ever towards clearness, fulness, and certainty. The spiritual presence is more real, and brings God, who is spirit, nearer to us. God revealed through material symbols, or acting by the elements of nature may more deeply impress our senses, but God's presence and spiritual energy, working in and through His Church, is more immediate and certain.

It may be asked why should God be hidden behind a veil? If God were more fully revealed would not scepticism vanish away, and unbelievers stand convinced, or fall down and worship before Him. Good

men like Moses have said, "Show me Thy glory," not knowing they were unable to receive the full answer to their petition. It is said the Emperor Trajan commanded Rabbi Joshua to show him his God. "Suppose we go first and look at one of His ambassadors;" said the rabbi: He led him forth into the open air, it was noonday, and bade him look upon the sun. "I cannot see," said the Emperor, "the light dazzles me." The rabbi replied, "Thou art unable to bear the light of one of His creatures, how couldst thou look upon the Creator?" God is hidden because we cannot see Him. None but a benevolent spirit can rightly perceive benevolent character in another, and none but a loving heart can fully understand love, so none but the pure in heart can see God. As we turn from sin to holiness, and as we change from selfishness to love, we perceive and know God, and have a consciousness of the presence of Him who dwells within the veil. The living personal God is found of them who seek Him aright, and shown to those who are able to look upon His glory.

II. WE HAVE IN THE MOST HOLY PLACE A RECON- CILED GOD.

The foundation of this hope, the firm anchorage of the soul, lies within the veil. How can man enter into it, and come before the presence of his God? The one great truth taught in that divinely-ordered economy is, that there is no approach to the Holy One, who dwells between the cherubims, but by sacrifice. Upon

the Jewish altars the morning and evening sacrifices were constantly offered. Acceptable worship and the remission of sin were through the shedding of blood, or more properly through faith that saw in the victim slain the type of a world's sacrifice in the coming Messiah. Still the entrance into the holiest was not open to ordinary men, or after the offering of the common sacrifice. It was only after special preparation, and offerings on the great day of atonement, that the high priest, bearing the censer of burning incense to cover with its cloud the mercy seat, and the blood to sprinkle upon it, could go in before the presence of the glory of the Lord.

We ask, why was the way of approach so narrow, and so carefully guarded? Why cannot man come acceptably before God, only through the suffering and death of a sacrificial substitute? It would scarcely be sufficient to answer, because God has so directed, and as God, He has the right to regulate the way and manner of His worship. God never acts without wise reasons or designs. Some are revealed, and among these that which will in part account for this restricted mode of worship. Look at its origin. Gen. 3. 8: "They heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day; and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God amongst the trees of the garden." Previous to this, any brief mention we have of intercourse between God and man, shows it to have been of a free, open, loving character, without fear or restraint. Now there

is a change. Man afraid shrinks back from God and hides himself, and God manifests sore displeasure with man for his sin. There can be no question as to man's fear, and his turning away from God; it is still a very general experience. Neither is there good ground for disputing God's displeasure or wrath. It is clearly set forth in the condemnation and punishment of the guilty ones, and the sending forth of man from the Garden of Eden. True, at the very time of the manifestation of displeasure, there is revelation of mercy in the promised Seed who was to work out man's deliverance; but this does not mean that the anger of God was assumed for effect, and did not really exist. God's anger against sin is real. Cain felt it so when he said, "My punishment is greater than I can bear," and the world saw it when, with an everflowing flood, the earth was cleansed from its wickedness. Moses knew it when in the mount the voice of intercession was stilled with, "Let me alone that my wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them." "Because there is wrath, beware lest He take thee away with His stroke, then a great ransom cannot deliver thee." "The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men."

Notwithstanding the clear statement of God's wrath against sin and sinners, we are still met with the assertion that because God is infinite and unchangeable in His love, He cannot be a God of wrath. Anger and love may exist together in the

same heart, as they are not opposites destructive of each other. Deeper down in the heart than anger or displeasure there may still be the yearning of earnest pity or love. We can easily conceive of a father angry at the criminal conduct of a wayward son, and manifesting in suitable ways that displeasure, at the same time loving him, and doing all that he can honorably and justly to bring him back to virtue and to his former place in his family. So God in wrath remembers mercy, and in the garden, while condemning the sin and the sinner, speaks of the seed of the woman to bruise the serpent's head. While He pardons iniquity, He will by no means clear the guilty. Wrath against sin is not unworthy of a God of love. It is necessary to the full revelation of His holiness, which must ever be in opposition to sin, and abhorrent of evil. In proportion to the strength of holiness will be the hatred and condemnation of iniquity. Our God is infinite in His love, but he is "of purer eyes than to behold evil, and He cannot look on iniquity."

Before man the sinner can approach unto God, and find peace and happiness in His presence, he must know some means by which this wrath has been, or may be appeased and turned aside. It is to God's solution of this difficulty, our minds are directed by the reference of the text, to that which is within the veil. Here we see the Lord's presence between the cherubims, upon the mercy seat, yet not accessible without blood. We stand before a great mystery which we cannot now explain. We know the revealed facts, that

without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sin, and that the High Priest entered into the Holiest of all "not without blood, which he offered for himself, and for the errors of the people." In like manner, Christ our great High Priest, has entered into the holy place, by His own blood, having obtained eternal redemption for us. Again, we are told that Christ "through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God," and that "once in the end of the world hath He appeared, to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself." He is now able to save, "seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them." These statements show us that the death of Christ had an effect in turning aside the wrath of God from the sinner, in opening a medium of communication between God and man, in making it possible for a holy God to be just, and yet forgive the sinner, and in providing a way of approach for man to draw near to God, with the language of confession, and the prayer of penitence. In a word, that by this sacrifice, God is now in Christ, not imputing their trespasses unto the world, implying that without such a means, He would impute them, and let His wrath arise against the sinner. Man has then within the veil a God reconciled, and reconciling the world unto Himself. The way into the Holiest is now open to all in Christ, and the sinner can come and be forgiven and saved.

III. THIS HOPE BECOMES SURE AND STEADFAST TO US WHEN WE GET HOLD OF IT IN OUR EXPERIENCE.

It is a hope that we have, and only as we have it in

possession is it firm to us personally. Through this divine plan of salvation in Christ, the sinner's heart can be reached, subdued, changed, and brought back into the fullest trust in, and loving obedience to, God. It is no cunningly devised fable of which man may be ashamed, but the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth. How can a man attain to this full assurance, and secure this firm anchorage for his soul?

The revelations of God to His ancient people in Horeb, are in the main, repeated in the experience of the man who finds this sure refuge. The first approach of God to the sinful heart is with the voice of law, and the first step in the way of salvation is the perception of His justice. We will never seek for safety till we know we are in danger. The law, if not spoken with that terrible voice from Sinai, yet comes to the conscience with a force that convinces man of sin, and produces deep consciousness of guilt. The voice of the Lord in the garden, finds man hiding with guilty fear and shame among the trees. Job when he saw God, said, "I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." David kept silence until the hand of the Lord was heavy upon him, and then he acknowledged his sin unto God, and did not hide his iniquity. Even Isaiah cries out, "Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips." Paul describes the beginning of the work in the soul thus: "I was alive without the law once; but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died." By this means, "Sin, that it might appear sin, working

death in me by the law, which is good, that sin by the commandment might appear exceeding sinful.' Experience of Christians in all ages might be quoted to corroborate these statements, but it is unnecessary. The fuller revelation of God, even to godly men such as Job and Isaiah, makes them abhor themselves and cry, "I am undone;" and it is not until the Lord accepts them, or cleanses the lips with the live coal from the altar, that they feel full rest and confidence in God's presence. The coming of God to the sinful heart, is the opening of conviction and the awakening of conscience to a sense of sin. The frequent response of man is to try and amend, or make some reparation for the wrong committed. The door of reconciliation is closed in this direction, as nothing that man can do can have any merit to atone for the guilty past. Neither were the past covered, has man the power to renew himself and work that righteousness which is acceptable to God.

In this extremity of utter helplessness, God reveals His salvation by the Gospel plan, and holds forth this hope to the alarmed sinner. On the divine side the work is complete; the ransom has been found; the atonement offered, accepted, and attested, by the resurrection and exaltation of Jesus Christ to the right hand of the Father. The holiest of all has been entered by our great High Priest, and the baptism of the Holy Ghost assures us that He prevails for us. This accomplished and accepted work of Christ is set forth before the returning, repentant sinner,

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as the propitiation for his sins, through which pardon can be obtained. Any nearer approach of man to God, any further acquaintance with Him, must be by his acceptance of this sacrifice as an atonement for his sins. God has accepted it, and man must accept it too. The cross is the only meeting place between a just God and a sinner. Here man, accepting and trusting in this atonement provided by God, finds pardon and peace, and is reconciled to God. God is now seen by him upon the mercy seat as a reconciled Father, and in his heart the Holy Spirit is sent forth as the spirit of adoption bearing witness with his spirit that he is a child of God.

Upon this yielding up of the soul to God, and exercise of faith, a fuller assurance is given. God manifests Himself in the believing heart by placing the Shekinah of His love within it. There is not, as of old, the resting of the cloud by day, and the shining of the pillar of fire by night, upon the tabernacle; but there is a surer testimony in the indwelling token of divine love. The bush burning unconsumed in the wilderness, and the voice from the middle of the bush, were convincing proofs to Moses of God's presence there; but the lighting and maintaining the fire of God's love in the selfish human soul is more wonderful, and a surer proof of God's presence in man's heart. By no law of mental philosophy, by no natural causes that we know of, can such an effect be produced. Moses, without God's power, smites the rock in the wilderness in vain to bring forth water; so man, with his convincing

logic, or persuasive rhetoric strikes the stony, sinful heart in vain to bring forth the living waters of true Christ-like love. We know that we have passed from spiritual death unto life, when we are conscious of the love of God in us, and feel the responsive throbbing of love to God and to our fellow-men. "He that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him." Then it is that "this hope maketh us not ashamed, because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us."

This assurance is confirmed and strengthened as we grow in the divine life. Keeping possession of this hope we purify ourselves as Christ is pure, and rise into a more perfect likeness to God. The love shed abroad in us is received in great abundance, till it fills, sanctifies, and rules the heart. The creating God, who at first formed man in his own image, now creates him anew, in that same image of righteousness and true holiness. If the heavens declare the glory of God's power, the regenerated and sanctified life of a true christian declares the higher glory of His holiness.

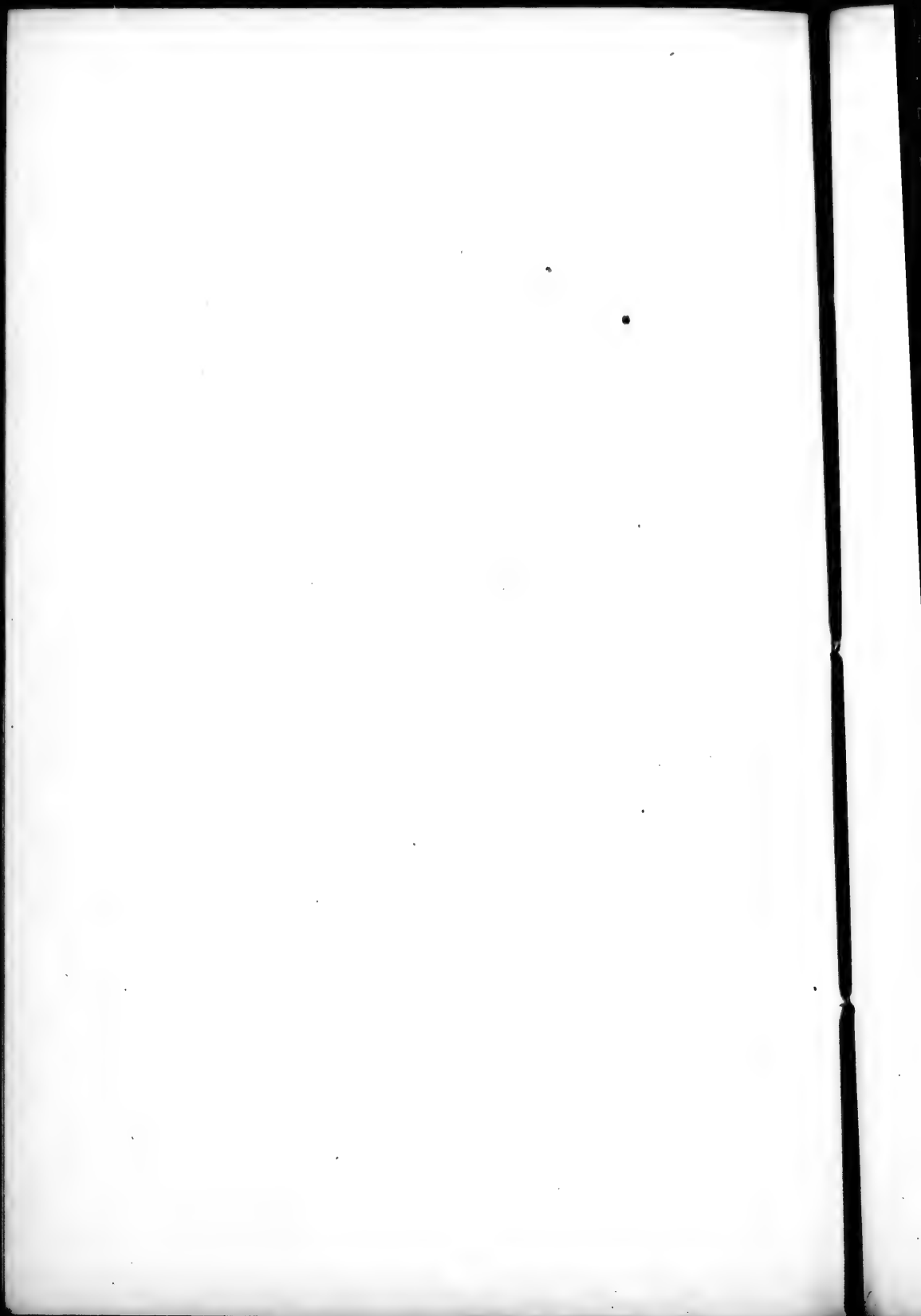
In finding a living God, reconciled to us in Christ, and manifested to us with comforting assurance by the Holy Spirit witnessing in us, we have the foundation of a hope which truly becomes to us, an anchor of the soul both sure and steadfast.

1st. We see the certainty which the religion of Christ gives to man. Outside of it what have we but changing customs and laws, conflicting opinions, groundless theories, and ever-varying philosophies,

among all of which we can find no safe chart for life's voyage, or firm mooring for man's soul. Here we find rest in God, faith sees Him within the veil, and brings the assuring response of His favor and love manifested in our hearts. We have salvation in possession, with its power over sin, and its joy illuminating the soul, as the clearest facts in our consciousness.

2nd. Let us highly esteem our great privileges. Why should we live in doubt of our soul's interest in Christ, when we may have it so fully certified? Need we sigh for a sign, or seek for symbols, such as our fathers had, when we have a more sure word of testimony, to which we do well to take heed? Let us avail ourselves of our privileges, by fleeing for refuge from sin and all perplexing doubt, to lay hold of the hope set before us. Get the soul safely anchored to God, and move on in the orbit of duty to a higher, purer, richer life, even life eternal with God. In the severest storms that can arise, we will fear no evil for God shall be with us. At last this hope shall in full fruition die, and we shall dwell with God, and be eternally satisfied with His fulness.





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2. *Historical Study*.—The Reformation ; D'Aubigne's History of the Reformation ; Seebohm's Protestant Revolution ; Fisher.

3. *Doctrinal Study*.—The Atonement. Text-books : Crawford ; Randles ; Miley.

4. *Apologetic Study*.—God and Nature. Text-books : Cocker's Theistic Conception of the Universe ; Buchanan's Modern Atheism ; Peabody's Science and Religion.

SECOND YEAR.

1. *Biblical Study*.—The Epistle to the Romans. Aids : Lange, Phillippi and Beet.

2. *Historical Study*.—Life and Times of Wesley. Tyerman's Life ; Smith's Methodism and Southey's Life ; Isaac Taylor's Methodism ; Watson's Reply to Southey.

3. *Doctrinal Study*.—The Person of Christ. Pope's Person of Christ ; Liddon's Bampton Lecture on our Lord's Divinity ; Glover's Historical Sketch of the Doctrine of Christ's Person.

4. *Apologetic Study*.—Rationalism. Hunt's History of Rationalism ; Fisher's Supernatural Origin of Christianity ; Mansell's Limits of Religious Thought.

THIRD YEAR.

1. *Biblical Study*.—The Psalms. Lange, Perowne, Tholuck.

2. *Historical Study*.—Modern Theology. Dorner's History of Protestant Theology ; Rigg's Modern Anglican Theology.

3. *Doctrinal Study*.—Christian Perfection. Wesley's Christian Perfection and Sermons, with Burwash's Notes ; Fletcher's Last Check ; Pope's Theology, Vol. III.

4. *Apologetic Study*.—Inspiration. Bannerman, Lee, Elliott, Pope's Theology, Vol. I.

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